



THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource — Employees

Call EAS: Olympia (360) 753-3260 Seattle (206) 281-6315 Spokane (509) 482-3686

Website: <http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eas.html>

■ Q. My employee has a restraining order against a boyfriend. If he shows up at work, I am supposed to call the police. Management and HR have been informed. Should I refer her to EAS because her personal problems are interfering with the workplace?

A. Your employee cannot be held responsible for the behavior of another person and the decision of a court to protect her from that person with a restraining order. If your employee's performance (i.e., her conduct, quality of work, or attendance) is not an issue, a formal supervisor referral would not be appropriate. However, EAS can still be helpful. A restraining order, particularly one that has a "no contact" provision in it, often indicates that violence or a threat of harm has been perpetrated against the person who sought the order. Such employees may experience much anxiety, which could certainly affect performance. It is appropriate to mention EAS to your employee and encourage her to take advantage of its services.

■ Q. What are the goals of an EAP when an employee seeks help?

A. EAPs, like your Employee Advisory Service, have four primary goals in working with employees. These goals include (1) identifying employees whose personal problems adversely affect job performance; (2) assessing the problems of employees, determining what resources are available to help them, and helping them establish a plan of action to access resources or services; (3) motivating employees to seek and accept appropriate help; and (4) helping employees get the services they need. To accomplish these goals, employee assistance professionals may use many strategies. Follow-up is important to ensure that employees don't face unnecessary roadblocks or lose motivation in implementing action plans. When supervisors and employees understand these goals, they are more likely to use EAPs, and less likely to decide who can and cannot be helped.

■ Q. My employee has an attitude you could cut with a knife. When you pass by her desk, she looks the other way. One time she punched a wall when she was angry, but that happened two years ago. Can I refer her to EAS for having a "cold personality?"

A. A supervisor referral to EAS is possible, but basing it on her personality style is not likely to motivate her to go to or to cooperate with EAS. You want her to make changes, so you need to articulate what these changes are more concretely, in terms of her performance. Ask yourself, "What can I see or hear that can be labeled as unsatisfactory?" If she consistently fails to look at customers or coworkers when they are speaking to her, this may be a problem, and it is a measurable behavior. Do any customers complain, or can you find out about complaints? Complaints by customers as well as coworkers are also measurable. Your belief that she has a cold personality is subjective. Determining how to articulate facts independently of your feelings will help you document problems, and hopefully get the employee to accept the feedback and an EAS referral, and ultimately make positive changes.

■ Q. It is going to be a tough year for my employees. All departments are facing large budget cuts, and there is a freeze on hiring. Other decisions yet to be made will threaten morale. I know EAS can help my employees, but what can I do to soften the blows?

A. Maintain a well-established communication system between you and your employees to help preserve their morale in times of high stress. Morale is often independent of stress and work pressure. A military combat unit under high stress, for example, can still possess high morale. Create two-way conversations with employees daily, or at least several times a week. This doesn't take much time. Twenty to 30 minutes a day to check on how things are going may be all that is needed. Failing to do this may result in lower morale in the face of increased work stress. Also conduct group meetings. They are crucial to keeping the lines of communication open between you and your employees. When decisions by management that may cause difficulties for employees must be communicated, be careful not to soften their impact unrealistically. Consider using EAS yourself, as a resource to help manage stress, and encourage your employees to do the same.

■ Q. I am concerned about an increase in accidents or near accidents of an employee. I know he's a heavy drinker, but it's only on his own time. How do I address this kind of problem?

A. A 5-year study by David Ragland of the University of California, Berkley (Sept, 2002) has linked the filing of worker's compensation claims to consuming 10 or more drinks a week. Not only did those workers have a greater chance of injury, but they also had more job-related stress. Workers who consumed 15 or more drinks a week had the highest risk. Reasons this causes job accidents include hangovers, sleep deprivation from staying out late, and even coming to work under the influence, which is not always noticed.

Job performance problems could be due to a variety of issues: alcohol or drug use, marital or other family problems, financial concerns and more. Supervisors must avoid prying into employee's personal lives. This is where EAS can play such an important role, and why the formal referral is so important. In a formal referral, while still voluntary, the supervisor calls EAS to make the concerns known. It is appropriate to tell EAS about the job concerns as well as what may be known about outside issues. Calls from a spouse or significant other, creditors calling the workplace and legal trouble are some of the factors important to relay to your Employee Assistance Professional. Then, if the person comes to EAS, a more accurate and comprehensive assessment is possible. The supervisor continues to monitor job performance and behavior.

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Visit EAS on our website at:
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